

The effects of Alcoholics Anonymous on women returning from prison

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The effects of alcohol abuse, as well as recovery from it, have been intensely studied. However, incarcerated women have remained an extremely understudied population despite steadily increasing in recent decades. One of the main ways to help individuals (as well as prisoners) with their recovery is through a 12-step program like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

A new study released in the March 2011 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, which is currently available at Early View, explores that subject in detail and found that AA attendance of at least once per week greatly increased the chance of a positive outcome.

According to Yael Chatav Schonbrun, a researcher in Butler Hospital at Brown University, this research is only the first step to help a population at risk of mental health disorders, risky sexual behavior and physical health problems.

"Despite the recent growth in this population, and despite the public health problems encountered, incarcerated women remain understudied. It is clear that AA is a widely available and familiar resource for underserved populations, and so it was logical to examine predictors of AA attendance, and how useful it would be for incarcerated women," he said.

The researchers recruited 223 hazardously-drinking women (averaged around 12 drinks per drinking day) from the women's facility at the

Rhode Island Department of Corrections Adult Correctional Institute and ran two sessions – one during incarceration and one after release – along with a one-, three- and six-month follow-up to determine alcohol and treatment use. During the sessions, a timeline method was used to assess the alcohol use of the participants in the previous 90 days, as well as determining the severity of their involvement with alcohol, exposure to other drugs and participation in AA.

The data showed that if the women attended AA once a week or more, there was a significant decrease in the levels of alcohol-related consequences, and an overall decrease in the total days spent drinking.

This research is the first of its kind to evaluate AA attendance and alcohol-related outcomes among incarcerated hazardously-drinking women returning to the community. According to Schonbrun, "given that AA is so widely available, and is a familiar resource among incarcerated women, finding a method to increase utilization of AA might have great utility for improving [alcohol](#) and alcohol-related outcomes for incarcerated women."

However, future research is still required to answer questions regarding the duration and frequency of AA attendance needed for positive results, as well as evaluating if incarcerated men behave in a similar way.

"We hope that this study will call further attention to the needs of incarcerated women," said Schonbrun, "and that this research will help to arouse increased interest in addressing the needs of this underserved population."

Provided by Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research

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